



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

Edward Mountain MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

23 January 2026

Dear Edward

Joint Scrutiny of the Climate Change Plan

I wrote to you on 9 December 2025 regarding joint scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft Climate Change Plan.

In that letter, I brought to your attention the fact that, while the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee had neither the scope nor the capacity to scrutinise the Scottish Government's draft Climate Change Plan, it had invited the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy to provide oral evidence to the Committee, in relation to energy themes raised across a number of petitions currently under consideration. As planned, that session took place on 14 January 2026.

As indicated in my letter of 9 December, I am now following up to provide an overview of some of the issues raised in the evidence session, which may inform further questions that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee wishes to put to the Scottish Government, as part of its scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan.

As a reminder, the CPPPC had agreed for the evidence session to broadly focus on the following themes:

- community engagement and input for energy projects
- the cumulative environmental impact of developments and strategic oversight
- the interaction between the Scottish Government's and the UK Government's policies on energy

The basis for these themes was the Committee's continued consideration of the following petitions:

- [PE1864: Increase the ability of communities to influence planning decisions for onshore windfarms](#)
- [PE1885: Make offering Community Shared Ownership mandatory for all windfarm development planning proposals](#)

Contact: Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. Email petitions.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

- [PE2095: Improve the public consultation processes for energy infrastructure projects](#)
- [PE2109: Halt any further pump storage hydro schemes on Scottish lochs holding wild Atlantic salmon](#)
- [PE2157: Update planning advice for energy storage issues and ensure that it includes clear guidance for the location of battery energy storage systems near residences and communities](#)
- [PE2159: Halt the production of hydrogen from freshwater](#)
- [PE2160: Introduce an energy strategy](#)

Community engagement with, and benefit from, renewable developments

The view expressed by the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy in front of the Committee was that, while renewables and low carbon energy represented a large economic opportunity for Scotland, these must be managed “in a way that brings people with them”.

Community engagement

Some members highlighted that community engagement around energy developments was variable, and that local voices were often dismissed.

The Cabinet Secretary’s position was that community engagement should be a level-playing field and that, regardless of the type of energy projects, engagement with communities should not be voluntary. The Cabinet Secretary suggested that her own engagement with the UK Government in relation to the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 led to securing the ability for Scottish Government ministers to mandate community engagement for energy projects.

Community benefit

The Cabinet Secretary indicated that she was aware that communities may be concerned about the scale of developments. Her stated view was that community buy-in for energy developments is a problem because many communities do not see the benefit of these developments.

She thereby highlighted her hope to see community benefit from proposed developments also mandated at UK level. She indicated that, if or when that happens, the Scottish Government intends to consult on what community benefit should look like, what conditions should be associated with it, and what the extent of it should be.

Local vs national decisions

Some members highlighted the feeling amongst certain communities that there was a democratic deficit in decisions related to new developments and that, even when local authorities turn down an application, the Scottish Government can overrule that decision. The Cabinet Secretary was asked for information regarding the number of applications granted by the Scottish Government, and the number of decisions taken by local authorities but overturned by the Scottish Government.

The Cabinet Secretary suggested that she would provide that information to the Committee, and stated that she could not recall, since becoming a Minister, having called in an application decided upon by a council.

Impact of new energy developments

Impact on land use

Members raised questions about how the Scottish Government is tracking renewable energy developments and what the Government's view is on land use, particularly in terms of the loss of agricultural land and food production land to such developments.

The Cabinet Secretary indicated that the work by the National Energy System Operator (NESO) to develop both a Strategic Spatial Energy Planning (SSEP) and a Regional Energy Strategic Plan for Scotland would shape the way in which Scotland's energy infrastructure will need to develop over coming decades, in order to meet demand and energy security requirements and to assess the cumulative effect of developments on communities, land use and the environment.

Environmental impact

Members wished to know what assumptions the Scottish Government has made regarding the impact of hydrogen production on water usage. The Cabinet Secretary explained that water usage was continually assessed by Scottish Water and SEPA, for all high-water usage industries in Scotland, including hydrogen production. She highlighted that any developers requiring high volumes of water for their projects would have to engage with SEPA and Scottish Water before submitting a planning application.

The Cabinet Secretary recognised that water scarcity was becoming a pressing issue in Scotland. The Committee was told that, given these general concerns, Scottish Water, SEPA and the Scottish Government were working together to produce water scarcity reports and assessments of where water is needed, whether for hydrogen production or for something else.

Some members pressed the Cabinet Secretary on how the Government could ensure that water supply was available without affecting traditional industries, given that most hydrogen production was expected to be done on the East Coast, while most water reserves are on the West Coast. The Cabinet Secretary's response was that Scottish Water had a critical role in this matter, in terms of its investment in infrastructure and its assessment of requirements.

Impact on biodiversity

Members were interested to know how it was set out that impact assessments on pump hydro storage (PSH) projects should take into account the overall effect on salmon populations.

The Cabinet Secretary indicated that SEPA had a dedicated working group which was exploring the challenges to water courses associated with PSH projects, including the cumulative impact of developments, the lack of formal coordination agreements for developers working in the same body of water, and the impact on fish populations more generally. The Cabinet Secretary stated that SEPA was developing guidance for the consideration of cumulative impact of such developments and, to the Cabinet Secretary's understanding, would consult on any such guidance.

Members expressed concerns about the timing of such work, given that decisions on applications are taken at present. The Cabinet Secretary reiterated that these issues were being explored by SEPA, and that, as and when more information would be available, this would be passed on to the Committee.

Energy sources and excess production

Some members suggested that, while most people were supportive of renewable energy as part of a balanced grid, there was a growing concern regarding the excess production of energy, as well as the issue of constraint payments. There was therefore a question regarding the need for a continuing backup of gas or nuclear sources, in order to maintain stability of the grid.

The Cabinet Secretary's view was that updated and improved capacity in the grid will allow more excess energy to be used and therefore avoid constraint payments. She underlined that the work commissioned from NESO will help the Scottish Government ascertain where the weak spots are in the grid and in energy generation in Scotland, and plan on the basis of that assessment.

The Cabinet Secretary agreed that a variety of energy sources was key, and that "as long as we rely on gas to heat our homes, we need to keep supplying it". The Cabinet Secretary indicated that she has engaged with the UK Government regarding the injection of hydrogen into the gas grid, which she was supportive of. She also reiterated the Scottish National Party's policy against new developments related to nuclear energy.

Some members continued to express concerns regarding the timescale of the transition from oil and gas to renewables, and they suggested this would be unlikely to happen within a decade.

Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan

The Committee requested an update on the publication of the Scottish Government's Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan.

The Cabinet Secretary indicated that the Scottish Government needed to assess, and come to a view on, a number of Supreme Court judgments, particularly in

relation to oil and gas licenses. In light of this, the Cabinet Secretary stated that she could not “give an answer to the question about when the final energy strategy will be published”. However, she was hopeful that this would happen before the publication of the SSEP in the autumn of 2027.

Conclusion

As indicated previously, the CPPPC intention in inviting the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy to provide evidence was to assist the Committee’s consideration of the relevant petitions, in order to make as much progress as possible on the ask of the petitions before the end of the current parliamentary session.

While the Committee is yet to come to a view on the issues raised in the session, I trust that the above summary of the discussion will be useful to your Committee in progressing its scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s draft Climate Change Plan.

Should you, or any of your team, have any queries on the above then please contact petitions.committee@parliament.scot.

Yours sincerely,



Jackson Carlaw MSP
Convener